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THE IMPLOSION OF THE SYSTEM

ECONOFICTION BAUDRILLARD, HYPERREAL, IMPLOSION, SIMULATION, SYSTEM

Baudrillard ties the instability of the system to the implosion, by which he implies that the system collapses in itself (and does not explode by a nuclear war, for example). It is in involution, that is, it abruptly collapses upon itself at one point. For Baudrillard, the system today is constantly moving in accelerating acceleration toward its culmination point or limit, and it is the increasing density of simulations that eventually destroys it. Simulation sucks up all the energy of the real and spews it out as an excess of the hyperreal. The system suffers from the ecstasy of the same. More and more of the same circulates self-referentially, that is, the circulation of images and

signs has lost all reference in the stage of hyperreality – signs refer only to further signs. What would have to be discussed.

This can be illustrated by the circulation and securitization of derivatives such as CDOs. These contain hierarchically structured claims to payments, namely tranches that are assumed to be safe and unsafe tranches. Even these risky papers were bought up again before the financial crisis of 2008 and packaged into new promises to pay. If a company buys the papers threatened by default in sufficient quantity, the risks can be bundled again and financed by further tranching securities, thus creating third-degree CDOs, etc. However, the very packaging of CDOs into CDOs of CDOs and into third-order CDOs does not abolish the a-linearity and diachrony of the structuring of risks, but instead leads to an implosion of CDOs and, at the same time, exacerbates the interdependence of financial institutions, through the successive increase of mutual credit claims.

For Baudrillard, each derivative would not only be an exact copy, but would also carry an exact copy of itself and could be exchanged for any other derivative at any point in time. The derivatives are worth different amounts so that they can be seen as representing themselves, and yet they represent each other perfectly so that they can reproduce themselves in any fractal environment. This type of approach is also used with great success by fast food franchise chains, which offer the same experience in every restaurant.

The implosion is accompanied by a destruction of meaning in the frenzy of the visible. The crisis nature of the economy, indeed the uncertainty of the world, is to be conquered by the artificial evidence of the derivative and the visible. In the current regime of simulation and the fractal, social and economic realities are produced from derivatives, signs, and models that precede the real; indeed, the model produces the “real” as the hyperreal, the medium and the message in one. As a result, the models and signs refer to nothing more than themselves. All signs or references float freely in a vicious circle or on a Möbius strip. In the hyperreal circulates the obsession of a surpassing of the signs by the signs.

Where the real is negated by the visibility of maximum artificiality in the hyperreal, it is precisely the fiction of a real beyond the hyperreal that emerges. For Baudrillard, for example, it is Disneyland that is supposed to conceal the fact that the real is no longer the real; it is no more real than Disneyland itself. The hyperreal is even meant to obscure indistinguishability of fiction and reality.

Thus, for Baudrillard, there is the real that is produced by the system, but also the real that is the absolute limit of the system. Baudrillard is not merely celebrating the simulation of simulation, the end of the real in the hyperreal as many of his commentators believe. Rather, his problem is also how to think the real when everything is simulation, how to deploy the real against the attempts of the various systems of rationality to explain it. But this is a problem that would need further discussion.

Signs, derivatives, and models circulate with increasing speed, with reference points becoming increasingly improbable. Financial crises show this. Central banks try to cure the over-

accumulation (too much of the same of the same) of speculative, fictitious and industrial capital, which cyclically leads to crises, by the over of their monetary policies. Undoubtedly, today central banks are major crisis actors that secure, prolong and extend the over of money capital through various interventions and interventions in the circulation of money, but they also just set new destabilizations in motion. Baudrillard sees the over of the same in all fields, from fashion to art to politics. As soon as the system reaches saturation precisely through accelerated excess, it begins to collapse in on itself, like a black hole. Things disappear by multiplication or contamination, by saturation or transparency, by attenuation or extinction, or by the epidemic of simulation, by passing into the secondary existence of simulation. Saturation leads to inertia.

For Baudrillard, global cities have already become black holes that eat up past social phenomena and meanings. They are purely functional zones arranged around sites such as hypermarkets (giant supermarkets), shopping malls, and transportation networks. Cities seem to be dissolving. This is because they have lost their clear purpose or use value; rather, they vibrate as polyfunctional black boxes with different input-output combinations. Utility is itself an ideology based on the simulation of scarcity or the creation of artificial scarcity. It is actually a moral convention, not a natural fact.

Supermarkets today are also insurance companies, banks, pharmacists, government information distributors, home delivery services, and more. This kind of hyperfunctionalism destroys functions, celebrating an operationalism without specific functions. All the various functions become instantaneously simultaneous, without past, future or distinction. All mental, temporal, spatial, and signal coordinates become interchangeable in the simulated world.

Power has long ceased to believe in the university. Degrees no longer have the value they once had. Hyperreality, the simulation of functions, neutralizes the surrounding territory.

For Baudrillard, the system is constantly haunted by the specter of crisis, which it presents as spectacle. It constantly juxtaposes its lack of alternative with its crisis (news, disaster films, crime films, action films). After the production of meaning, all that remains is the circulation, and ventilation of signs and images as spectacle or in panic mode. Explosions are anticipated and excluded. But implosion, the death of the cybernetic, combinatorial world, remains a constant threat.

Some social institutions are collapsing faster than others. Law is in crisis because it is a second-order power. It is being replaced by the norm. Instead of dealing with explosions that defy the law, it deals with deviation as an anomaly that deviates from the average. It is undermined by parody, which makes submission and transgression equivalent. Power, in turn, is disempowered by the slippage of meanings and the absence of referentiality. It becomes an empty simulation of power. It threatens to collapse because it dissolves in the play of signs.

Power tries to resist the collapse of meaning by reintroducing the real and the referential everywhere. It tries to convince people that the social world is still objectively real. It prefers to point to crisis or even desire rather than admit its own collapse. In the past, it fought the threat of the real by transforming it into equivalent signs. Now it fights the threat of simulation by playing

with crisis. It adopts theories of ideology and even radical critiques to maintain the appearance of truth.

The entrepreneurial subject is in a similar situation of crisis. The system, especially under neoliberalism, relies on self-responsibility of the entrepreneurial subject. But in a system based on bureaucratic programming, irresponsible actors are needed – figures like Eichmann who simply follow orders or perform functions. Subjects are put into a drift, a kind of permanent unconscious state. Without fixed relationships, everything turns into a stream of transmissions. The substitution of functions for meaning leads people to expect everything to work all the time. A delay of a few seconds in loading a web page becomes an inexplicable source of immense frustration. The causes have disappeared, but the effects have become immense – such as when a local disaster causes a global shutdown.

This generalization of responsibility can be traced to the loss of symbolic exchange. The generalized, unlimited responsibility arises because nothing is exchanged anymore; the terms of exchange are simply exchanged among themselves. The system generates nothing but dizziness and fascination. Generalized responsibility is synonymous with generalized irresponsibility and the breakdown of social relations. Values such as responsibility, justice and violence circulate only as state-imposed simulations. This in turn is fatal for the “scene” of politics.

Production and meaning are replaced by simulation and fascination. The content – information, culture, commodities – is now only the support for the functioning of the code, the medium. The function of the code is simply to reproduce the mass. Information devours its own content, transforming the real into the hyperreal. On the one hand, Baudrillard connects simulation with code and cybernetics; on the other hand, he emphasizes the chaotic dimension of simulation as a state of undecidability and indeterminacy, as the end of the reality principle and the implosion of the binary dichotomies on which the reality principle is, after all, essentially based: “The age of simulation is opened everywhere by the interchangeability of formerly contradictory or dialectically opposed concepts. Everywhere the same genesis of simulacra: the interchangeability of the beautiful and the ugly in fashion, of the left and the right in politics, of the true and the false in all messages of the media, of the useful and the useless on the level of objects, of nature and culture on all levels of signification. To be sure, Baudrillard still attributes this universal interchangeability of signs to the work of the code, insofar as it generates formal, operational models in which content and meaning no longer play a role. Nevertheless, the moment of simulation can no longer be thought in the figure of the code and with it of the system. On the one hand, simulation is described as a state of referencelessness, but on the other hand, the code still endows a certain kind of reference signifier. Baudrillard gradually resolves this theoretical contradiction by gradually saying goodbye to talk of code. Instead, he speaks, above all, rather of images, which are more difficult to determine than codes, which makes it much easier to represent the chaotic moment.

At the end, Baudrillard speaks of a fourth stage of signs and values, the fractal. Again, there is the concept of a chaotic element present in all fractals. In mathematics, this is an imaginary number (square root of a negative number); in chaos theory, this is called the butterfly effect. This leads to

a singularity, an extraordinary event, a stock market crash, a riot, or an unprecedented terrorist attack like September 11. But even these events cannot prevent the system from lurching towards its death by implosion.

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